

A Case Based Analysis Preparation Strategy for Use in a Classroom Management for Inclusive Settings Course: Preliminary Observations

William J. Niles: Adelphi University

Alan Cohen: Mary Mount Manhattan College

Case based instruction (CBI) is a pedagogical option in teacher preparation growing in application but short on practical means to implement the method. This paper presents an analysis strategy and questions developed to help teacher trainees focus on classroom management issues embedded in a set of “real” cases. An analysis of teacher candidate reactions to the exercise is included and a rubric to evaluate cases for inclusion in a classroom management course is presented.

Case based instruction (CBI) continues to evolve in teacher preparation programs. The central strength of CBI is the ability of the case method to approximate real world experiences. Students are able to “see” real events, interact with the language of participants, separate truth from fiction, and experiment with outcomes without entering a classroom (Butler, Lee & Tippins, 2006; Elksnin, 1998, 2001; Garrod, Smulyan, Powers & Kilkenny, 1999; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; & McNaughton, Hall, & Maccini, 2001). Greenwood and Fillmer (1999) describe CBI as a “middle step between coursework and actual teaching” (p. v). A wide variety of case method options are available to the educator (Elksnin, 2001; Goeke, 2008; Mayo, 2004; Mitchem, Koury, Fitzgerald, Hollingsead, Miller, Tsai, & Zha, 2009; Wasserman, 1994). In addition, users of CBI can develop their own cases or have students do the same (Elksnin, 2001; Lengyel & Vernon-Dotson, 2010; Wasserman, 1994). Whether practitioners use predeveloped cases or

home grown, the advantage remains the same: Students can experience, analyze and plan a response and relate case study outcomes to real/ personal experiences.

Gaps in CBI Research

With all the positives of CBI, the research agenda designed to unearth strategies that work and to examine student outcomes remains unrealized (Elksnin, 1998; Goeke, 2008). As a result, how to present cases, promote meaningfulness, manage discussion and reach resolution are continuing areas of interest and concern of case method practitioners (Elksnin, 2001). In recent analyses of CBI, Elksnin (2001), Goeke (2008) and McNaughton et al. (2001) also declared that the level of training and competence of the students exposed to CBI might play a significant role in how a case is presented and attacked.

Another important area that remains unstudied is preparing students for the case based experience (Elksnin, 1998, 2001; McNaughton et al. 2001). Elksnin (2001) and Greenwood and Fillmer (1999) concluded that open ended and non-structured case analysis may be less effective in achieving internalization and generalization of learning than case preparation methods that involve focused and structured questions. Towards this end, Elksnin (2001) developed a “Case Preparation Form” that employs a set of descriptive questions to study a case, and Greenwood and Fillmer constructed the “Small-Group Decision-Making” model for use by students to develop a personal case and present it. In addition, preparation structure helps facilitators organize and structure class discussions (Elksnin, 1998).

However, Elksnin (1998) and McNaughton, et al. (2001), note that additional approaches to case presentation analysis and establishing which instructional strategies or combination of activities are needed to promote learning in CBI continues to need exploration. Second, the prevailing theories of CBI require that students ground their analysis and action in evidence-based practice (Elksnin, 2001; Greenwood and Fillmer, 1999; Kauffman, Mostert, Trent & Hallahan, 1998). McNaughton et al. (2001) conclude that CBI must force students to integrate “formal knowledge and informal knowledge” to create a solution for a case based problem (p.1). This may be especially true for inexperienced students in teacher preparation programs. Translating theory into practice and defending a position based on case material and theoretical constructs are needed to energize and focus the learning experience for the prospective teacher. A secondary gain from preparation structure and grounding analysis in theory is that CBI facilitators are helped to organize and structure class discussion (Elksnin, 1998).

Essential Elements of CBI

In order to achieve a formative CBI experience, there is evidence, mostly anecdotal, that the following elements are necessary:

1. The application experience is the key to developing a professional knowledge base through CBI (Elksnin, 1998).
2. Students need to defend their case analysis by citing evidence from the case, course readings and lecture material, and that case resolution options selected should flow from the case and course materials (e.g. course text, lecture, etc.) (Greenwood & Fillmer, 1999; Kauffman et al., 1998).
3. Students should have the opportunity to challenge theory and research in the field (Garrod et al., 1999).
4. Case analysis questions should challenge students (Wasserman, 1994) and provide opportunities for higher order thinking (Greenwood & Fillmer, 1999).
5. The format and questions included in the case analysis preparation experience should allow students to observe and analyze data, argue a point of view, suspend judgment, and distinguish between fact and fiction (Wasserman, 1994).
6. Case analysis questions should push the student to take the perspective of another (Wasserman, 1994).
7. Wasserman (1994) further indicates that CBI and how students prepare to engage in the experience, must promote “habits of thinking” (p. 604). The ability to think through a case logically, not only allows teacher preparation students to interact with and assess case facts, problem solve and make decisions in the university classroom, but the discipline prepares them to use these skills in the classrooms they will occupy in the future.

Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of CBI

A dimension of CBI that is less discussed is having students reflect on the cognitive and affective dimensions of the teacher and student’s behavior in the case under study. Kauffman et al. (1998) believed that including a reflection dimension in the CBI allows prospective teachers

to see more of what they will experience in real classrooms with real students with real problems. Kostelnik, Onaga, Rohde, and Whiren (2002) reminded us that when working with children with special needs “the feelings and perceptions of adults either tend to motivate them into action or predispose them to choose actions to take in coping with the problems they encounter” (pp.175-176). Garrod et al. (1999) agreed but went one step further. They suggested that reflection and perspective taking in the CBI experience, “May allow students to examine either directly or from a safe distance, some issues in their own lives” (p.1). Harrington, Quinn-Leering and Hobson (1998) note that reflection and perspective taking leads to a professional “open mindedness”, i.e., “the ability and willingness to recognize and value the validity of other perspectives beyond one’s own” (p. 29).

While there is some question when reflection and taking the perspective of another should occur in CBI (Greenwood & Fillmer, 1999), Kaufman, Mostert, Trent and Hallahan (2002) and Larrivee (1999) agreed that speculating on, accepting and acknowledging students feelings, in this instance within a classroom management context, forces the future educator to focus on the student’s needs and goals. Kauffman et al. (2002) proposed the following questions for teachers to promote perspective taking and reflection (p.35):

1. Are students giving me clues to their feelings about themselves and the classroom?
2. Have I listened and observed carefully to detect the emotions that accompany their behavior?
3. Have I asked them directly about what they think and feel about specific events and conditions?
4. Can I connect what I observe and hear to a pattern or cycle of acting-out behavior?

A Structured Approach

The authors developed and refined a case based analysis preparation strategy and questions

for use in a classroom management for inclusive settings course required for teacher candidates. The strategy incorporates the essential elements noted above and utilizes a critical question model based on the work of Good and Brophy (2003), Kauffman, et al (2002) and Levin and Nolan (2000) (see Appendix Case Study Report Outline). The structure of the exercise allows participants to interact with case “facts” and to generate personal meaning and response options from coursework and textbook resources (for example Kauffman et al., 2002; Larrivee, 1999; see Appendix Case Selection Rubric).

The strategy directs teacher candidates to explore learner problems and teacher behavior that contribute to misbehavior in the case. Speculation on learner problems forces the participant to explore the child’s academic skills, behavioral needs and modes of responding. The focus on teacher behaviors forces teacher candidates to consider the lesson objectives, instructional strategies, motivation and assessment practices of the teacher, as well as the teacher’s classroom management strategies, response to misbehavior, and expectations for the student (Niles, 2005).

Strategy Implementation Sequences

The preparation strategy has two steps. First, students develop a summary of the case and prepare an individual response to each case analysis question. Second, students are grouped and convene, usually outside class time, to develop a consensus response to each case analysis question. The key aspect of the group experience is achieving consensus, that is the achievement of an agreed upon response by all group participants

(Johnson, 2000; Niles, 1986). In addition to the individual and group analyses, the authors have utilized individual and group presentations to the entire class followed by discussion and group debates where group members contest the individual positions taken in response to case analysis questions.

Teacher Candidate Response to the Strategy

In response to a series of open-ended questions, the teacher candidates in two sections of a course on classroom management reported that this was their first exposure to the CBI approach. A few who were coming to education from business schools had experienced something similar before. For the vast majority, CBI was most helpful in developing their critical thinking skills and their ability to take multiple perspectives. Improving problem-solving and analytical skills were also mentioned as benefits of the approach. The cases were overwhelmingly seen as realistic representations of what occurs in schools. Teacher candidates acknowledged that the questions and organization of the task did help them to clearly think through situations. For some, the task became doable or just easier as they gained more experience with additional cases analyses. For a few, it was laborious from start to finish, but for the vast majority, it was an informative learning experience.

The biggest reported shortcoming of CBI was the very nature of the task itself; having a set number of generic questions to answer about each case. Some candidates found it hard, especially in the early stages of learning the approach, to understand exactly what the questions meant. Others reported that it was difficult to apply generic questions to specific cases and they believed they would have benefited from more direction. An additional fairly common concern was that the cases lacked some information that might have been helpful and there was concern that the actual outcomes were unknown. The teacher candidates wanted details and closure. A few candidates found the cases to be very time consuming and, whether, they benefited from the approach or not, may have preferred to spend less time following the CBI format.

Most of the candidates seemed to benefit from the CBI approach and would have not changed anything about the way it was implemented.

However, some would have preferred more didactic instruction from the professor, to be told exactly how to analyze a situation and what the “right” response would be. Some candidates would have liked a more gradual introduction to the method or perhaps to learn and practice some guiding principles before analyzing cases on their own.

There appeared to be some difference in the responses of those with and without actual teaching experience. Those without teaching experience may have seen the cases as more helpful in orienting them to classroom management issues. These “green” teacher candidates felt that they were being exposed to real future challenges. Those with teaching experiences seemed to need to find a more direct connection between their job experiences (e.g., high school teaching) and the presented cases. In future analyses of reactions to CBI, it would be helpful to obtain demographic data regarding the nature and extent of teaching experience.

When asked what they found easy about CBI the most common answers were giving their own opinions or identifying the perspective of the student or teacher. Another common response was that there was nothing easy about the approach at all, yet, in contrast, a few found the highly structured format made the task easy.

In response to a question asking them to state what was most difficult, the most common answers concerned the format of the approach itself. Some candidates found it a stretch to identify as many issues as they were asked to do. Some found the format constraining and requiring them to operate or think “within the box” while they valued a more flexible approach.

It was somewhat surprising to find that only about one-third of the respondents found that CBI helped them to understand what they were observing in schools. The majority reported that the cases used tended to be too different from what they were seeing in schools. In some instances the

cases described more extreme problems than they were observing. Additionally, a number reported that while it may be relatively easy to analyze what is occurring, real teachers have many response choices available to them and they don't necessarily respond in ways described by the text or what the candidates understand best practice to be.

Summary and Conclusions

Case based instruction remains a useful vehicle in teacher preparation course work. Butler, et. al (2006) note that CBI helped teacher candidates develop an understanding of classroom issues; bridged the gap among their knowledge base and evidence-based practices; and rehearsed conflict resolution strategies. This paper presents a specific CBI preparation strategy utilized in a teacher preparation program that attempted to answer some of the presentation issues highlighted in the CBI literature, e.g., greater structure in analysis procedures, perspective taking, and reflection on cognitive and affective responses of the teacher candidates who analyze the case.

Teacher candidates exposed to the CBI approach in two sections of a classroom management course found the method to have a number of benefits, especially with regard to enhancing their critical thinking skills and perspective taking. There seems to be a period of discomfort for some as they learn a new way to think about cases, but most can appreciate how it helps their thinking. There is some question as to whether the skills learned are generalizable given that several of the candidates did not see a clear relationship between the cases and the actual scenarios they were encountering in their teaching jobs.

CBI, by design, tends to be open-ended and less didactic than a more traditional delivery of information model of teaching. Clearly, some candidates prefer the challenge of CBI while other would prefer to be told more, to hear more directly from the professor. Since teachers on

the job don't have access to a pocket textbook of classroom management, nor their professor sitting on their shoulder whispering management tips, the important question is whether any one approach to preparing teacher candidates better prepares them for the complex realities of actual classrooms. To answer this question would entail both controlling the type of instruction provided during the candidates' training and then directly assessing the effectiveness of the teacher's classroom management skills. Future studies would, therefore, need to control as many of the variables attendant to CBI as possible and develop methods for assessing on-the-job performance. As part of the first endeavor we offer a rubric that can be used to evaluate cases for inclusion in a course using CBI. The rubric attempts to evaluate potential cases for their fidelity to what the literature reports as essential features of the model (see above).

The objective of the CBI experience relates directly to the overall goal of the classroom management course--that is to promote the development of a working theory of classroom management based on the interaction of evidence-based practices and "real" experiences. This is especially true in inclusive environments where classroom behavior is not limited to the academic experience but may relate to disability characteristics and/or feelings of helplessness and success/failure attributions.

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Author's Note

Professor Niles is an Associate Professor at Adelphi University, School of Education. His research interests are in the field of teacher preparation, classroom management, and teacher collaboration.

Alan Cohen is an Assistant Professor and Chair of Teacher Education at Mary Mount Manhattan College. His research interests relate to students with disabilities and disability studies.

Appendices

Case Study Report Outline

Part 1. Summary of Case

A brief summary of the case to include a description of the problems, issues and concerns presented; a description of how each was addressed; and a description of the outcome(s) is presented in this section. Clarity and brevity are expected. The key is to know the case and to focus on classroom management issues.)

(Note: Before you analyze a case, read the material several times. The first and second reading should focus on understanding and then summarizing the fact pattern of the case, the role of the various characters, the actions taken and the outcome(s). During these readings try to minimize the tendency to judge or impose a point of view on the case and its characters. The next readings occur after you have familiarized yourself with the Case Analysis Questions listed below. At this point additional readings will help to gather information for the responses you wish to provide.)

Part 2. Case Analysis Questions

1. (*)What is the key classroom management issue in the case from the perspective of the teacher in the case? What are other classroom management issues (list at least five (5))?
2. (*)What action is taken by the teacher to resolve the key classroom management issue as well as the other issues identified in question #1?
3. Why, in your judgment, did the teacher choose the response described in the case to resolve the key issue? Discuss his/her motivation, needs, etc., using case material only. Support your contention(s) with course text book page references.
4. (*)What is the outcome of the teacher's action for each issue?

Part 2. Case Analysis Continued

5. What issues are overlooked or left unresolved in the case? Why, in your opinion, are they overlooked or left unresolved?
6. What is your reaction to the teacher's actions? Include a cognitive and affective response.
7. (*)What options to resolve the key issue and the other issues should the teacher have considered? Consult the course textbooks and be specific.
8. (*)What option would you have chosen? Why?
9. What additional information related to this case would have been helpful to you to understand the issues or select an option? Explain why?
10. (*)What is the key issue in the case from the perspective of the student in the case? What are the other issues (list at least two 2)?
11. What action is taken by the student to resolve the key issue and the other issues identified in question #10?
12. Why, in your judgment, did the student choose the response described in the case to resolve the key issue? Discuss his/her motivation, needs, etc.; use case material only. Support your contention(s) with course textbook page references.
13. (*)What options to resolve the key issue and the other issues in the case could the student have chosen with your guidance? (Consider the age of the child and other characteristics of the child presented in the case, e.g., a disability, etc. Consult the course textbooks and be specific.)

Note: Case Analysis Questions with an (*) form the basis of group presentations to the entire class.

General Guidelines for the Aggregate of Cases

Target description	Meets or exceeds target	The case approaches or partially satisfies the target	General Guidelines
The cases and related questions represent real-life situations	Readers, whether novice or experienced, would recognize the case as credible. The teachers and students in the case have depth and complexity	The scenario appears valid, but the language used or thinking of those portrayed does not ring true.	Cases will be taken from actual events. Cases should relate to what beginning teachers could be reasonably expected to encounter within the first few years of their careers.
The cases require the application of professional knowledge and skills	The case requires a working knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, the nature of typical and atypical child development, the nature of disabilities and health conditions and their affect on behavior, best practices for planning instruction and for creating a safe learning environment,	The case requires a narrow range of knowledge and skills. For example, the case deals almost exclusively with a single legal issue such as suspension.	The range of cases call for knowledge of planning and instruction, the role of the physical environment, use of communication skills, social skills instruction, modeling, crisis prevention and intervention, how to use data, teaching self-awareness, effective and varied behavioral methods, how to design and manage daily routines, the use of assistive technology, how to effectively use feedback, and skills of problem solving and conflict resolution.
The cases require evidence (e.g., text sources, law or regulation) to respond appropriately	The case requires an understanding of or ability to apply best practices. There are legal or regulatory principles to be understood and followed.	The case and/or questions require a narrow understanding of best practices or applicable law.	The cases, on the whole, require reference to text material and lectures and may require identifying and using online sources and/or other scholarly sources of information.

Target description	Meets or exceeds target	The case approaches or partially satisfies the target	General Guidelines
The cases are open-ended and have more than one possible resolution	Given the same fact pattern, differing analyses are possible. There is no one right answer.	The cases or questions lead toward a prejudged conclusion.. Taking the less obvious position is possible, but would require more knowledge or experience.	The cases require the ability to understand the fact that alternative actions almost always exist, and that there are degrees of judgment and interpretation in most scenarios.
The cases require careful analysis and higher-order thinking	Cases may involve the identification of legal or behavioral issues, but will also involve skills such as synthesizing multiple sources of information, applying theory or best practice to the problem, choosing or evaluating solutions, creating new solutions.	The case or questions could be addressed with just the recitation of a fact or research finding.	The cases require evaluation of competing solutions. At the least, the cases require the application of knowledge to specific scenarios, not recall.
The cases require candidates to distinguish between fact and opinion, between current conditions and potential outcomes	Responses to the case require the candidate to identify their opinion as separate from the facts of the case	The case makes assumptions that suggest a preferred solution	The cases lead to an appreciation of the difference between what is accepted as common practice or common wisdom versus the knowledge and skills that have been supported through research. The cases help to clarify where evidence based practice and the candidates' belief are the same and where they are different.
As a whole, the cases chosen represent a variety of challenges	For the whole set of cases, there is representation of different age levels, with developmentally relevant behavioral concerns	The range of cases is restricted as to age level or the type of problem.	A range of cases are given including typical/expected problems and highly challenging and/or less common problems. .

Target description	Meets or exceeds target	The case approaches or partially satisfies the target	General Guidelines
As a whole, the cases represent students and teachers in diverse settings	The cases represent students and teachers of different cultures, races, language backgrounds, socioeconomic status, gender and/or sexual orientation, religions, etc.	The cases omit certain groups or present a stereotypical view of one or more diverse groups.	The cases require an awareness of culturally responsive methods of working with diverse populations, as well as understanding of how some groups cope with or express bias and prejudice.
Cases require taking the perspective of another, i.e., the student and teacher	Response to the case requires teacher and student perspective taking that includes cognitive and affective dimensions	Cases or questions focus more on one domain (cognitive or affective) rather seek a balance.	The cases will stretch the candidates' ability to empathize and understand another's perspective. Some cases will require candidates to take the perspective of people very different than themselves (e.g., a student who is a member of a gang, a student with beliefs or practices that differ from the predominant culture).